

Status Distinctions and Family Organization / 55

says, "He has no land" it is the equivalent of stating that a man is poor. But the contrast between landless and landholders from a purely economic point of view is not sharp, because most landholders have tiny holdings and do not live any better than many who are landless.⁴ Yet, even the ownership of a small parcel adds to a man's social standing because of the positive value associated with land-ownership. The acquisition of even a small parcel of land gives the Tepoztecan a feeling of well being and security. It should be noted that the landholders and the landless do not constitute distinct social classes, and there is no conflict of ideologies between them. [565]

Within the category of landholders a distinction is made between (1) *propietarios*, those who own private land; (2) *ejidatarios*, those who hold *ejido* parcels; and (3) *tlacoleros*, those who work communal lands. The economic aspects of these three distinct tenurial types will be treated later.⁵ Here it should be noted that, in a sense, each represents a distinct status group, with the greatest prestige attached to *propietarios* and the least to the *tlacoleros*. In addition, each group has different and sometimes conflicting interests, and as such is developing distinctive group consciousness.

The *tlacoleros*, for example, organized themselves during the thirties and have taken the leadership in defending the communal lands in boundary disputes with other municipios, because these are the lands upon which they depend. The *tlacoleros* as a group have been opposed to the nationalization of the communal lands of the municipio and the creation of a municipal *ejido*. They view the transfer of *tlacolol* land to *ejidatarios* as a threat to their interests. Thus, the *tlacoleros* are the staunchest defenders of the ancient Indian system of communal land-ownership. [664]

The *ejidatarios*, on the other hand, do not share the collectivist tendencies of the *tlacoleros*. On the contrary, they seem motivated by a strong sense of individualism and would like to become private owners of the *ejido* parcels assigned them. The *ejidatarios* are perhaps the most politically conscious group in the village, for their welfare depends in large measure on political considerations, and particularly on maintaining cordial relations with the *ejido* commissioner. [664]

LABOR RELATIONS

Most landowners in Tepoztlán have occasion to be both employers and employees during the year. As employers they hire *peones* to help with the planting and harvesting, and as employees they hire themselves out to other landowners or artisans when work on their own land is over. This double role is a common one and blurs whatever class lines there are in Tepoztlán. Even those who are *peones* the whole year round hope some day to be landowners and employers. Also, employees are frequently relatives, *compadres*, or friends with whom there is a reciprocal arrangement of aid or labor exchange. There are no men who employ many workers on a large scale; three or four *peones* who are hired for short periods

⁴ The contrast between landholder and landless was much sharper before the Revolution.

⁵ See Chapter 6, "Land Tenure," p. 113.

423
556466
472

[669]

56 / LIFE IN A MEXICAN VILLAGE: Tepoztlán Restudied

- 466 during the busiest parts of the agricultural cycle are considered a good number.
[472] The relations between employer and employee are generally characterized by a spirit of mutual cooperation as well as by a recognition of equality of status. The employer usually works side by side with his workers, addressing them in *tl* if they are his own age and in *Vd* if they are older. In most cases a *peón* works for another only if he receives good treatment, and frequently feels that by working he is conferring a favor upon the employer. It is common for a laborer to quit a job if the employer is too imperious, demanding, or vigilant. Even in Cuernavaca, Tepoztecan workers have a reputation of being "too independent" and sensitive to slights.

- 357 There are few full-time domestic servants in Tepoztlán. Women may be hired to assist in households during fiestas, at the birth of a child, or when the mother is seriously ill. Several well-to-do families hire a laundress regularly. The absence of a servant class is in striking contrast with European rural villages and is evidence [565] of the essential classlessness of Tepoztecan society. When domestic help is needed, it is common to call upon relatives and friends. There is a reluctance to hire maid-servants because it reduces the privacy of the home. When it is unavoidable, servants are sought from among the other villages of the municipio rather than within Tepoztlán itself. Conversely, women consider it humiliating to be servants. Orphans or the daughters of the very poorest families seek such employment, and [628] they prefer to work in Cuernavaca or Mexico City rather than in their own village. [736] [735]

EDUCATION

- 555 Less than twenty years ago the distinction between the *cultos* (educated) and the *ignorantes* (ignorant) was based on the ability to read and write. With the spread of education this no longer holds. The graduates of the local school and even of the secondary schools are no longer considered *cultos*. The status of *culto* is now applied primarily to lawyers, doctors, and dentists, who live in the city, and to a few local residents who dress in city clothes, write a good letter, run a typewriter, use big or unusual words, and are intelligent and well informed. A *culto* does not necessarily have to be citified or schooled in modern ways, for one of the best known *cultos* is an old candlemaker famous for his study of Náhuatl and for his skill in speaking that ancient language. *Cultos* generally receive respect and admiration, although they are not above criticism if they have undesirable personality traits. For example, one of Redfield's principal informants was described by many of my informants as a man who was *culto* but who was also *chiflado* (lightheaded).
871
517

POLITICS

- 571 The *políticos* are the local leaders who are active in politics, and as such have a special status in the village. They have many "friends" and *compadres*, and have influence with local and state officials. They generally know how to talk well, and often act as representatives for the more retiring and humble villagers in their dealings with state or federal agencies.
66
554

Division of Labor / 111

participation, there is strong social pressure as well as fear that the saint may be offended by failure to work for his upkeep. Still, in recent years there has been increasing difficulty in obtaining barrio cooperation. Now three of the seven barrios rent out the land and use the rental for the expenses of the chapel.

The barrio *cuatequil* cleans the churchyard and repairs the chapel. Barrio differences in this connection are interesting. Although the smaller barrios of San Pedro, San Sebastián, and Los Reyes are the most reliable workers on the village *cuatequil*, they appear to be the most neglectful in the upkeep of their respective chapels, indicating perhaps that Catholicism has less of a hold in these barrios. Indeed, it was in the barrio of San Sebastián that a Protestant sect won over about fifteen families. The barrio of Santa Cruz, also very poor, is known for its superior care and great devotion to its chapel. The larger barrios, too, keep their chapels in repair.

The third occasion for the *cuatequil* is that of a group of neighbors within the barrio who may agree among themselves to repair the street or to build a water tank or some other local improvement. This *cuatequil* generally involves fewer people and still occurs quite frequently. During our visit to the village four new water fountains were built in this way. The *cuatequil* of the barrio and of neighbors would seem to be a natural mechanism for a great deal of cooperative endeavor on a purely voluntary basis. But the poor quality of human relations in the village, and the fear to take the initiative in any venture, keep cooperative undertakings at a minimum. Yet the fact that there exists a tradition of cooperative forms of labor has occasionally led to truly heroic and dramatic undertakings. The most recent example of this was the construction of the road to Cuernavaca.

One of the features that characterize all occasions of collective labor is the free use of drink. It would seem that Tepoztecs need the stimulus of drink to enable them to work together successfully. The implications of this for the analysis of the Tepoztecan character will be discussed later.

WAGE LABOR

Although wage labor is an old practice in Tepoztlán, labor is not viewed impersonally as a commodity that can be bought and sold on the market. The relationship between employer and employee is a very personal one; and as a rule, a man will not work for someone he does not like. Tepoztecs are almost as particular about choosing the men they work with as they are in choosing drinking companions. This attitude of independence has become much more marked since the Revolution, for Tepoztecs now have alternatives not available then. The democratic ideology of the Mexican Revolution has influenced Tepoztecs, who are jealous of their new freedom. The harsh treatment received by Tepoztecan laborers on the haciendas and sometimes even in the village before the Revolution would be un bearable today.

It is the custom for the employer to seek out laborers, rather than vice versa. In fact, most Tepoztecs consider it humiliating to ask for a job, and ordinarily a man

621

476

794

626

178

427

795

476

653

621

571

273

466

465

432

669

113 / LIFE IN A MEXICAN VILLAGE: *Tepoztlán Restudied*

466 would rather go hungry than go about the village asking for work. Also, some of
[465] the younger men are sensitive about asking for their wages, and often the mother
will collect the wages for her sons.

[464] When a farmer needs a hired hand he will usually try to get a relative, frequently
an uncle or nephew; or he will ask his neighbor or *compadre*. If no one is available
within this rather close and intimate circle he may seek no further. As a result, we
sometimes find the curious situation whereby some individuals complain of a labor
shortage while others may have no work.

464 The peak wage labor season is from May to August when corn is being planted
[221] and cultivated, and from December to January for the harvest. During these pe-
riods there is sometimes a real labor shortage which leads to some mutual labor
exchanges. It is estimated that a few hundred Tepoztecs work as day laborers
during the busy season. At the most there are about four months of wage labor
during the year. The landless may work as *peones* during the entire period or they
may work part-time in *tlacolol*. The small landowners will also work as *peones* to
get some extra cash. Thus some are employers of labor for a short time and are then,
in turn, wage laborers for someone else.

465 Wages have gone up considerably in Tepoztlán during the past twenty years and
are much higher than in other villages like Tzintzuntzan, Mitla, or Chan Kom.
The reason is the proximity to large urban centers and the haciendas which pay
relatively high wages to attract labor. But the rise in wages has not kept up with
the rise in prices of many basic commodities.

The Quality of Inter-Personal Relations 299

husbands and wives, a young wife often addressed her older husband in *Vd.*, while he used *tú* to her.

The *Vd.-tú* relationship may also exist between employer and employee, particularly if the latter is younger and is well known to the employer. However, if an employer addresses an older employee in the familiar form, it is a sign of lack of respect and is taken to be an insult. When both persons are of the same age and are not strangers, they address each other in the familiar form.

In pre-Revolutionary days it was customary for wealthy *caciques* to address the rest of the population as *tú*, regardless of age, and to be addressed as *Vd.* Today, wealth plays a minimal role in the *Vd.-tú* relationship, in part because of the absence of sharp class differences, in part because of the humble origins of many of the present well-to-do. The memory of the deep hostility and fierce vengeance of the subordinate population toward the *caciques* is also a deterrent in taking advantage of higher economic status.

Men holding political office or political ambitions are generally careful to avoid the *Vd.-tú* relationship with other adults for fear of offending. They prefer the *Vd.-Vd.* relationship, for they seek many *compadres*, or the *tú-tú* relationship in which they acknowledge friendship or acquaintance with most people of their own age group. However, local officials tend to speak condescendingly in the *Vd.-tú* relationship to more humble Tepoztecanas, as well as to people from outlying villages, regardless of their age. This attitude of arrogance on the part of the officials and respect for the authorities on the part of the general population is carried over from pre-Revolutionary days, as is the notion that to speak to the local president in the familiar *tú* adds to an individual's importance. However, within Tepoztlán proper, officials no longer dare to express superiority of status to the majority of the adult inhabitants. Only the priest and nuns maintain an *Vd.-tú* relationship with the rest of the population.

The *tú-tú* relationship is an intimate one and is used between husband and wife, sweethearts, and children. It is also used between two people of the same sex and of approximately the same age. However, in Tepoztlán this *tú-tú* relationship does not always imply intimacy, but rather the possibility of intimacy. Thus, it is from the same age group that the *cuates*, drinking companions, singing companions, and so on, are drawn; but for the rest, the *tú-tú* relationship may be almost as reserved and formal as *Vd.-Vd.* In this, Tepoztlán and other rural villages differ from the city where the use of *tú-tú* is reserved for only the most intimate friends, all others of the same age being addressed as *Vd.*

At least among the school children and older students there is a tendency toward urban usage of *tú* and *Vd.*, that is, the custom of having fewer but more intimate *tú* relationships and a greater number of *Vd.* relationships. Traditionally in Tepoztlán, although members of the same sex and age group continue to call each other *tú*, there is a marked withdrawal from intimate relations as they get older and particularly after marriage. The *tú-tú* relationship is undoubtedly a potentially dangerous one to continue, because of the equality of status and the possibility of

195
554
571
576
593
178
466
578
565
556
646
778
792
793
593
572
171
369